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## MAN IN A BOX – THE TRADITIONAL DEFINITION OF MASCULINITY

@ Keith Edwards(<https://keithedwards.com/author/keithe/>)

📅 October 10, 2012(<https://keithedwards.com/2012/10/10/>)

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I've often used the Man in the Box activity, which I believe was created by Paul Kivel, to help participants in **workshops** (<http://keithedwards.com/campus-visit/keynotes/>) illustrate the social expectations on men.

Below is a video of this activity using the responses from my **research**

(<http://keithedwards.com/2013/03/20/putting-my-man-face-on-college-mens-gender-identity-development/>) participants and highlighting the role of misogyny and homophobia in policing the expectations of men and the intersections of other forms of oppression.



## n the Box

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Traditional Hegemonic Definition of Masculinity (THDM) is a wordy way of describing the external expectations of men that society places on us. This definition is “traditional” in that it is rooted in long held cultural ways of defining what it means to be a man. It is “hegemonic” in that it places men above people of other genders AND some men above other men. It defines some men above other men in the ways it intersects with classism, racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and other forms of oppression. One of the ways racism works is trying to emasculate men of color for their skin color and culture. One of the ways classism works is by emasculating working class men for the status of their job, the cars they drive, and the clothes they wear. And so on.

## MAN IN A BOX

This definition of masculinity is reinforced in many ways, but two primary ways are through misogyny and homophobia. Misogyny is the hatred of women and homophobia is the hatred of gays and lesbians or those who label in that way. Now that sounds academic and complicated but two five year old boys can illustrate this for you on the playground. One five year old boy throws the ball and it doesn't go very far. The other five year old boy yells, “Man you throw like a girl!” That is misogynistic because if being a girl weren't bad it wouldn't be an effective insult. The boy who was called a girl responds by yelling something homophobic at his friend. Now, it is likely that this five year old boy has no idea what that word means, let alone the history of hatred, violence, and aggression associated with that word. However, he knows that when he feels emasculated by misogyny, that responding with homophobia is a way that he can try and prop up his masculinity according to the traditional hegemonic definition of masculinity.

If that is what we know about masculinity at five years old, imagine how well we are trained to call each other “girl” and “gay” by the time we are 18 years old and in college. Imagine how we have to constantly escalate the violence and aggression in calling each other “girl” and “gay” in order for that to have an effect if we've been calling and been



## Traditional Hegemonic Definition of Masculinity

phobia

misogyny

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gay  
fag  
queer  
fairy  
sissy

authority responsible breadwinner  
**drinking to excess** strong  
swearing play sports competitive  
**not preparing for academics**  
rational unemotional tough fighting  
get girls **PARTYING** disruptive  
in control not vulnerable aggressive  
successful **drugs** don't cry  
not gay drinking not feminine  
**competitive hetero sex**  
**breaking the rules** sex

girl  
bitch  
pussy  
wuss  
vagina

classism racism ableism  
anti-Semitism

other  
oppression

(<http://keithedwards.com/2012/10/10/man-in-a-box-the-traditional-hegemonic-definition-of-masculinity/external-expectations/>)

### *Traditional Hegemonic Definition of Masculinity*

called that all of our conscious lives. This definition of masculinity is part of creating a patriarchal system that perpetuates, contributes to, and reinforces patriarchy. This is how the traditional hegemonic definition of masculinity oppresses people of other genders, marginalizes some men, and limits all men.

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